

Imagine the western Kentucky area becoming the home to a host of new industries, most of them related to aluminum. It shouldn't sound far-fetched, especially since the region's economic development agency is turning a spotlight onto the prized commodity.

What most people don't realize is that this immediate area is already home to several aluminum-related factories serving customers throughout the United States. In fact, northwest Kentucky has eight of them which employ more than 2,100 people. Another 11 aluminum-related businesses are within an hour's drive and employ an additional 3,000.

In this region alone there are Rio Tinto Alcan, Gibbs Die Casting, KB Alloys, Hydro Aluminum, Eastern Alloys, Sonoco, Homecare Products, Pride Industries, and Dana. And don't forget that Century Aluminum is just down the road and Alcoa Warrick is across the river in Indiana.

As you might expect, they all have one thing in common: aluminum – whether they use it, create it, or provide alloys for it. If the Ohio River could change colors, it would certainly flow silver.

“Communities will spend hundreds of thousands of dollars trying to create a cluster of companies,” said Kevin Sheilley, NWKF president. “Thanks in large part to the presence of Rio Tinto Alcan, we already have an aluminum cluster in Northwest Kentucky. Anything we can do to build on that is a benefit for everyone.”

Earlier this year, Alcan Sebree joined several other local aluminum related companies to create an Aluminum Network with the primary goal of attracting new businesses into the area. It operates under the auspices of Northwest Kentucky Forward (NWKF) – the regional economic development agency.

Rio Tinto Alcan itself has a rapidly emerging Regional Industrial Development (RID) program in many areas around the world with the purpose of attracting new aluminum industries into their respective areas or to lure companies that support aluminum. In November 2007, Rio Tinto Alcan's corporate RID office in Canada began working with Sebree to establish an RID initiative here. Sebree's Kenny Barkley is overseeing the local initiative as part of the Community and External Relations program.

The Aluminum Network has already met once and will do so again next week to determine goals and objectives, including how to best brand the region as aluminum friendly. The initial meeting in March centered on introducing the members to each other and to find out their common needs. The group met one other time with a prospective client.

“By having our aluminum-related industries as active partners, we can recruit new companies that meet needs as potential new customers or suppliers. Not only will this help us to create new jobs in our region, but by meeting needs of existing companies, we can help to make sure they can continue to be successful here.”

Kevin's NWKF staff has already performed research on the aluminum industry and they have set up a portion of their website to inform related companies about the area's offerings. Most notably, there are:

- Active riverport on the Ohio and barge access along the Green River
- Nation's lowest cost electric power
- Central Location-one day's drive of 2/3 of the US population and manufacturing
- The aluminum industry has a huge presence throughout Kentucky which is a significant user of aluminum products
- Quality Workforce--the Northwest Kentucky workforce is above the national average in productivity.

Chief among the local assets is the Four-Star Industrial Park, which is just a couple of miles from the Sebree plant. The large complex was developed a few years ago with the intent of attracting new businesses – including Columbia Sportswear. The site is called Four-Star to represent the four counties comprised in NWKF: Henderson, McLean, Union and Webster.

Kevin noted that the development of the Aluminum Network is unique to any area in the U.S.

“Recently, the Network members had an opportunity to meet with an aluminum prospect that is considering our region for a new facility. The thing that most impressed the company about Northwest Kentucky was the Network. This company has multiple facilities and is looking around the country for this new plant, yet they said they had not seen anything comparable to the Network and were very impressed.”